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[Progress report]

1. Development of a Single Business Register

In July the Cabinet of Ministers accepted a proposal to start with the development of a first version of a Single Business Register (SBR). The main feature is that it will be based on the matching of units in the participating registers. It will be an instrument to link different registers. Matching takes place on the basis of identifying information like names, addresses and identification numbers (when available).

So, the SBR doesn't have the function of a primary registration of businesses. This task stays with the participating registers, the so-called task-registers. A task-register reports new entries to the SBR. On the basis of matching software it will be defined whether the unit is already registered. When not, the reported entry will be included in the SBR getting an identification number. This identification number has only a technical meaning and will not be used in administrative procedures with businesses. The reporting task-register gets back this SBR-number and includes it in its information-system. This number will be used in the exchange of administrative data between the task-registers. If a positive match has been taken place, the reporting task-registers get the SBR-number.

Besides the identification number a limited set of identifying data will be stored in the SBR-database. The data refer to natural persons, incorporated persons and associations of natural or incorporated persons, which carry out economic activities according to the definitions of the participating registers. Also information on physical locations is included. Participating task-registers are obliged to use those data in their primary register process.

Also mutations are reported by the task-registers. Priority rules define which of the connected registers is charged with the verification of those mutations. In most of the cases this will be the Trade register of the Chambers of Commerce, which have legally the task of registration of businesses.

It is planned to implement this system at the end of 2002. Connected registers will be the register of the Chambers of Commerce, the register of the Tax administration (VAT, Pay roll, Income Tax and Incorporated Taxes) and the register of Statistics Netherlands (only recipient of data). Social security funds, Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Welfare, Health and Sports plan connection in the years after 2002.

The main advantages of this approach are: minor legal adjustments, minor adjustments of the primary processes at the connected registers, fast implementation and intrinsic forces for improvement of the quality of registers (converging forces).

Parallel with the development of this first version a study will be carried out for further development of this concept.

2. New Statistical Law

A new statistical law will be brought in parliament within a few months. This law regulates a more independent status of Statistics Netherlands. Also this law regulates access to registrations kept by (semi) governmental institutions to use the data for statistical purposes. According to the present law, institutions have to give permission and can refuse access. Proposed is a liability to provide data without payment like business have to provide data in statistical surveys.

Another feature of this law is the regulation of the concept of 'informed consent' to be able to combine administrative data with data from questionnaires in the statistical production process.

3. New strategic plan for the medium range, 2002 - 2005

In 2000 the organisational structure of Statistics Netherlands is changed drastically. Almost the complete management team is changed and production processes are 'under reconstruction'. The new board of directors has reformulated the medium range goals and ambitions and developed a number of elementary strategies to achieve them. Some key elements in this strategic plan are:

- Collection of own data only if this information is not available from other sources
- Further development of knowledge and skills to match data from administrative sources, to translate them to statistical concepts and to combine them with survey data
- Further development of the Social Statistics Database (SSB) and the Economic Statistics Database (ESB)¹ as the basis for much of the standard output of Statistics Netherlands and a starting point for the compilation of integrated information systems and all types of customised research.
- Data protection is a crucial pre-condition
- Establishment of a centre for policy-related statistics (e.g. monitoring the effects of policy)
- To act as a bureau of standards, to promote the use of international standards (more particularly European standards, so as to improve the international comparability of statistics)
- Set up strategic research projects with universities, Dutch central bank, planning agencies

4. Euro conversion

The general business register (ABR) and especially BaseLine (a database with information from the taxation authorities related to the statistical unit 'Enterprise') contain valuables. A project has been carried successfully to make these information systems ready for the introduction of the EURO in January 2002.

5. Redesign of the business register (ABR)

Statistics Netherlands decided to use Microsoft products as standard. The business register is build with ORACLE-products. This is the main reason for the development of a project to rebuild the ABR. The database will be migrated to SQL-server. The user-interface will be build with Visual Basic.

However there are some other reasons for the redesign. First of all: with the introduction of the first version of the Single Business Register (SBR) Statistics Netherlands has obliged itself to build an interface between the SBR and the ABR. The main advantage of the SBR will a better linkage with the in the SBR participating registers. For Statistics Netherlands it is important to get a better quality in the linkages with the taxation registers. For the moment about 75% of the VAT-turnover can be linked to statistical units. This percentage can be improved to about 95%.

Another reason for the redesign is manageability of the present register system. It is operational since 1993. Due to changing demands the information system has undergone a lot of adjustments, often by building additional programs not integrated in the core-software. This increasing big jumble of programs is increasingly difficult to manage. Also the user-interface has to be modernised.

Also important is that in line with the evolving statistical demands some functionality have to be changed, some can be removed, some have to be added. Special points of interest are:

- improvement of the registration of events
- new procedures for the handling of frame errors
- improvement of the software for the delineation of statistical units
- improvement of software to define the existence of enterprises.

¹ Those databases contain a large part of the information available at Statistics Netherlands on persons, households, companies and institutions.